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SUBJECT: CHILD TRAFFICKING IN WESTERN MARITIME GUINEA

REF: CONAKRY 00220

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Authorities express their concern about child trafficking, but also stress the importance of focusing on the prevalence of child exploitation in the region regardless of where the children came from or how they got there. This cable is the third in a series of reports on child trafficking in Guinea. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) During a trip to Boke and Sangaredi the week of June 4-9, Asst Poloff met with local authorities, police, and NGOs working to combat child trafficking, including Save the Children and Club Amis du Monde (CAM). Asst Poloff also had an opportunity to inquire about a recent child trafficking case (reftel) that was investigated by authorities in Boke and Sangaredi, which resulted in the alleged traffickers being released.

ENCOURAGING VIGILANCE AMONG CITIZENS

¶3. (SBU) The Governor of Boke, Siafa Beavogui, expressed his disappointment that Guinean children are increasingly being treated as a commodity. He said the problem is child exploitation not child trafficking, and he is trying to work on potential sources of demand for children in his region. The governor said that he has found a high prevalence of children working at the 500 small sea ports that line the administrative district of Boke, but does not know where the children came from or how they got there. The Governor said that he is working with fishermen, sensitizing them and recruiting them as monitors for child exploitation in the ports.

¶4. (SBU) The Prefect of Boke, Keita Mamadou, said that he is setting up "vigilant communities" on his Prefecture's border with Guinea-Bissau to monitor the border for child traffickers. The prefect explained that while it is not easy to transport children over the Guinea-Bissau border, cross-border communities are making it possible. He also said that while he does not have specific cases of child trafficking, he knows that some children are being trafficked over the Guinea-Bissau border to work on cashew plantations in Guinea.

NGO ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION

¶5. (SBU) Asst Poloff held a joint meeting with Save the Children Regional Director Ibrahima Diallo and Club Amis du Monde coordinator Abdoubacar Sylla to discuss child trafficking issues in Western Maritime Guinea. The NGOs shared their activities to combat child trafficking and child exploitation. When asked about specific cases of child trafficking, the NGOs have only been involved in one official case (reftel).

¶6. (SBU) Mr. Sylla said that they know children are transported for child labor in the cashew plantations of Western Maritime Guinea. He

said that even though the children are exploited, the parents are aware so there is no child trafficking occurring. Mr. Sylla also brought up another case of a nine year old boy who was beaten by his Koranic teacher in a town 50 kilometers from Boke. Mr. Sylla said it is a complicated case though because his teacher is a "relative," who was entrusted with the boy. He added that family or community linkages create complications when trying to convict someone for child trafficking, abuse, or exploitation.

RECENT TRAFFICKING INCIDENT INVESTIGATED

17. (SBU) Asst Poloff went to Sangaredi to meet with the Special Police Commissioner Ibrahima Sory Sylla, who investigated the case of the two marabouts allegedly trafficking 11 children to Senegal through Koundara (reftel). Mr. Sylla presented a large file for investigation, which he said lasted 14 days. Mr. Sylla said he took this case very seriously and documented every meeting, participant, and decision. Mr. Sylla said that the two marabouts - Boubacar Bah and Mamdou Balobah - were both Guinean from Daramagnaki, which is nearby Sangaredi. All 11 children in the case were from the town of Bambaya, about 15 kilometers from Sangaredi.

18. (SBU) Mr. Sylla said that a group of ten people (NGOs, local authorities, and police) convened for a two day meeting to review the incident. Save the Children and CAM were involved in this meeting. Mr. Sylla said that the group decided this was not a trafficking case, but a case of child exploitation because the marabouts did not have the means to support these children. He confirmed previous reports that the children were returned to their village and the marabouts released. When asked whether he thought

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these marabouts would try to do this again, Mr. Sylla said that he confiscated their travel documents so that they could not cross the border. Mr. Sylla added that Sangaredi had not been involved in any child trafficking cases up until this incident. He then outlined a number of recommendations that came out of a two-day meeting regarding the incident, including sensitizing local officials about child trafficking and increasing border security vigilance to combat child trafficking.

19. (SBU) Asst Poloff also asked Save the Children Regional Director Ibrahima Diallo and Club Amis du Monde coordinator Abdoubacar Sylla to comment on the investigation. Both NGOs said that this was a case of child exploitation, not child trafficking. Mr. Diallo from Save the Children said that this case could not be considered child trafficking because the Koranic scholars, also know as marabouts, had parental consent to take the children to Senegal. He continued by saying that trafficking cases usually involve an intermediary that transports the children to someone who intends to exploit them. Mr. Sylla added that this was a case of child exploitation because the marabout would likely exploit the children because he did not have the financial means to support them during their Koranic studies in Senegal.

COMMENT

110. (SBU) This cable represents a continuation of Embassy efforts to understand child trafficking issues in Guinea. Embassy has only recently had reporting that suggests Guinea's Western Maritime border experiences child trafficking to Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. While there is a consensus regarding the prevalence of child exploitation in Western Maritime Guinea, there does not seem to be an agreement on whether the children are also victims of child trafficking. Parental consent and guardianship are only complicating authorities' and NGOs' understanding of child trafficking. The Embassy has been receiving a number of reports that point to Koundara as a possible hub for child trafficking. A recent trip to the region, reported septel, explores this possibility in more depth. END COMMENT.

CARTER